

Embrace

by Separatist Supporter

Category: Halo
Genre: Hurt-Comfort, Romance
Language: English
Characters: Lucy-B091, Tom-B292
Pairings: Lucy-B091/Tom-B292
Status: Completed
Published: 2012-07-05 21:57:40
Updated: 2013-01-29 04:45:19
Packaged: 2016-04-27 01:02:01
Rating: T
Chapters: 8
Words: 10,739
Publisher: www.fanfiction.net
Summary: Seven times they held each other. Tom-B292/Lucy-B091. Now complete.

1. Seven Times

Disclaimer: Halo belongs to 343i. If I ran it, this pairing would be canon by now.

****A/N:**** Because there needs to be more Tom/Lucy. Also, I wanted to try a different writing style. Additionally, I haven't read Glasslands yet.

Word count: 557

The first time they held each other was not romantic (or even platonic), but necessary. Jumping out of Pelicans alongside the scores of other prospective SPARTANS on a late, cold night they had landed (crashed) in close proximity to one another and huddled together, battered and bruised, for warmth. They conversed while they waited; by the time the Camp Currahee personnel picked them up, each called the other friend.

* * *

><p>The second was in victory. The first time Foxtrot had won an exercise against the rest of Beta Company, beating the other teams through a combination of intelligence, audacity, and just plain luck. Caught up in the moment, without a thought he had pulled her into his arms. The embrace lasts just long enough to draw the attention of their teammates and friends, whereupon she is released with a hastily muttered apology and, though obscured by protective gear, both their faces flush with chagrin.

* * *

><p>At the third, she is saving him; a quick start and a leap give her enough momentum to latch onto him and take them both clear of an Insurrectionist grenade. The contact is brief, but the two feel more secure and at peace in those few heartbeats than they have in far too long. As quickly as it comes, however, the moment is gone and with a roll they are apart and up and shooting at the traitors.<p>

* * *

><p>At the fourth, he tries to protect her. Not from physical harmâ€"those dangers are long passedâ€"but from the nightmares he knows will plague her (and himself) at the loss of their friends and comrades, knowing they were as complicit as the Covenant in the deaths of so many they held dear.<p>

She does not push him away and he is grateful for it, because he needs her as much as she needs him.

* * *

><p>On the fifth occasion, they are again brought together by grief. So much they had held as certainty swept awayâ€"their home, their mentor and friends gone; replaced with a world that for all the natural beauty that surrounds them is even more artificial and different faces, some they have known for years, other for only a few days. They seek what comfort they can from each other.<p>

* * *

><p>The circumstances surrounding their sixth embrace are far less unhappy than those that came before. Still trapped in the artificial world and bound to their duty, they meet far from their peers. They communicate in a language only they are truly fluent inâ€"discussing their futures, making plans. A consensus is reached without uttering a single word. They can lie in each other's arms only briefly (they can disappear from camp for only so long before they are missed); they left as friends and returned as not quite lovers.<p>

* * *

><p>The passage of time between admitting their feelings in the Shield World and being freed to act upon them is not insignificant. Years and too many lost friends later, when humanity has achieved a modicum of peace and what killing must be done no longer requires weapons of their caliber, they lie together and watch the starsâ€"contemplating just how fortunate they were, that they survived where so many others did not. Lovers now, they remain in each other's arms and consider the future they can build together.<p>

A/N: Just so anyone looking at this chapter knows, the succeeding chapters are the expanded snippets.

2. Chapter 1

Disclaimer: Still don't own Halo.

**A/N: **Background information mentioned here was largely made up

for this fic and only colony names are canon.

Response(s) to review(s):

Guestâ€"Thank you; obviously, I agree. I'm still working on Non Sequitur, just not in a linear fashion.

Cima1305-Thanks.

Word count: 1,404

* * *

><p>"Attention, recruits. I am Lieutenant Commander Ambrose. You have all endured great hardships to be here. I know each of you has lost your loved ones on Kholo, New Constantinople, or Troy. The Covenant has made orphans of you all."

A stiff, cold breeze swept over the landing field and many of the children standing there shivered involuntarily, but none broke the silence as they listened to the man in green armor speak.

"_I am going to give you a chance to learn how to fight, a chance to become the best soldiers the UNSC has ever produced, a chance to destroy the Covenant. I am giving you a chance to be like me: a SPARTAN."_

If it was possible, the landing field became even quieter as the Officer's words sunk in; each child grappling with what they had been told. Some eventually broke the silence, talking softly in small groups while others kept their thoughts to themselves.

One of the latter was a dark haired boy. By the standards of six year olds, he was good at keeping his emotions off his face; while outwardly appearing calm, he was internally caught between nervous excitement and complete terror. He wanted to make the aliens pay for taking his parents and siblings from him, but he could not help but be scaredâ€"of dying, of failure, of not being good enough.

The man in greenâ€"the SPARTANâ€"had resumed speaking, talking about how they could not take everyone and that the silver haired Navy man beside him would sort them out. He was a little apprehensive at the announcementâ€"what if he was not able to do what they needed him to? Where would they send him?

"_You want to be SPARTANs? Then get back on those ships."_

The nervousness in his gut grew worseâ€"he was terrified of flying. Nonetheless, he (and he distantly noted, a few others) began to slowly move back to the dropships. His parents had always told him to face his fears and he did not intend to let them down. Soon more children, emboldened by the actions of the others and him or herded on by the Navy man's threats to declare them washouts, were streaming towards the Pelicans.

As it happened, being one of the first to the ships put him in the very backâ€"at the end of a line two dozen long and composed of kids with every disposition Tom could think of. The Navy man in the back of the transportâ€"not the one from the field, much youngerâ€"was shouting instructions, trying to be heard over the Pelican's

engines.

The boy had put on the 'Falcon Wing' and secured it as instructed (it weighed about as much as he did) with help from the nine or ten year old girl next to him. The rear hatch opened and what warmth was in the ship was sucked out into the night even as the engines were drowned out by the wind.

He watched as, one by one, the other children took their turns at the edge. Most jumped, some did not. The Navy man showed no reaction either way. All too soon it was his turn. With slow, deliberate steps he walked up to where the metal floor gave way to open air and grabbed the guide line. He took a few deep breaths in a vain attempt to calm himself, closed his eyes, and jumped.

The ten seconds between leaving the Pelican and pulling the handle on his pack were among the most terrifying of the boy's short life. The wind whipped at him from seemingly all directions; he tumbled, trying to count to ten and find the red handle at the same time, all the while with a rough idea of what would happen if he did not bouncing around his head. He managed, though the sudden stop felt like he had been hit in the stomach with a fast moving Gravball.

Once the shock passed, he was able to look around. Above and around, he could easily see the last kids making their descent, their Falcon Wings blotting out the stars as they moved. He could see the lights on the landing field and kids who had jumped before him angling towards it. To his dismay though, he realized that he and several others had been off course or opened their parachutes too late. If he tried to go for the field, he would wind up in the trees. He looked around frantically before spotting a small clearing he knew he could reach. Carefully, he worked the parachute to take him there.

He made it, though the landing was not smooth. Dragged across the sticks and rocks that covered the clearing until he was able to wriggle out of the harness, the boy emerged scraped and bruised but otherwise unhurt. He had started towards the middle to wait to be picked up when he heard a loud splash and a string of language that his parents would have no doubt preferred he not.

He followed the noise until he reached a creek, hidden from aerial view by the trees. In said trees, he could see an empty Falcon Wing harness. In the creek was the parachute's user; a dark haired girl probably his own age, soaked and shivering as she tried to find a way up the steep banks that were a good deal taller than she was. Getting flat on his stomach, he reached down and offered a hand.

She took it. Progress was slow—the dirt on the banks giving out twice and almost sending them both into the water—but he got her out, muddy and cold though she was. She was small, the fact made more apparent with her soaked clothes clinging to her. A chilly breeze swept up around them and he saw her grimace before she sank to the ground and curled up to try to stay warm. He could not leave her there.

"Come on," It was the first he had spoken since arriving on Onyx. "Let's get you someplace warmer."

Someplace warmer ended up being wrapped in his Falcon Wing. Unable to see the landing field from where they were and unwilling to cross

unfamiliar ground in the dark, he led her back to the clearing and gave her his shirt so she would have something dry to wear (He had lived in one of the colder regions of his homeworld, the night air did not bother him much.). When he finally managed to drag his descent pack back to the center of the hollowâ€”it having gone from merely heavy to heavy and ungainlyâ€”she was sitting down, his too big shirt stretched over her legs, her face a picture of embarrassment. He sat down beside her and used the parachute as a blanket, draping it around them until he could no longer feel the wind cutting at him. She was still shivering, so he put his arms around her and pulled her up against himself.

They were silent for a while before she spoke, asking him simply: "Homeworld?"

"Leonis Minoris V (1). You?" He had had no problem with the quiet, but it was nice to interact with someone again.

"Kholo. Who did you lose?" She had been orphaned recently then; he had heard the Navy men on the ship that had brought them all to Onyx talking about Kholo being glassed.

"My parents, three older brothers." Talking about them with her was not as painful as it had been with othersâ€”she had suffered the same, knew what it felt like.

She sighed. "Parents. Baby sister." He said nothing to thatâ€”he had never wanted anyone's pity and he doubted she did either.

She looked directly at him for the first time since he had aided her at the creek. "Why did you help me?"

He shrugged, "I've always tried to be helpful. Why change, when we'll have to work together to fight the aliens anyway."

She nodded, apparently happy with his reasoning. "Thanks . . ." her voice trailed off.

"Tom."

"Lucy."

Later, Tom would realize just how significant the exchange had been; that freely telling each other just that little bit about their old lives was the start of their friendship. Just then, though, his thoughts went no farther than keeping the girl beside him warm until they were found.

* * *

><p>(1)â€”The Leonis Minoris system exists in Halo canon, but none of its three colonies are named.<p>

A/N: Three of these will be from Tom's POV and three from Lucy's with one from both or something more like the snippets.

3. Chapter 2

Disclaimer: Same as last time. I don't own _Halo._

****A/N:**** Astute observers will notice that I've changed the genre from Hurt/Comfort/Romance to Hurt/Comfort/Friendship. This is completely accurate for the first five, since only the last two actually involve romance at all.

****A/N #2:**** Yes, I know the chapter is mostly buildup, but I am unwilling to post a chapter less than 1k words long.

Word count: 1,337

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><p>Officially, the Drill Instructors had been relieved from taking part in combat exercises; ostensibly so that the Beta Company recruits could get a better grasp of how the people they would be fighting alongside operated through first-hand experience against each other. Unofficially, both because Mendez could lie as easily as he could breath and because the unreliability of pre-mission intelligence had been one of the first lessons they had learned, the trainees kept an eye out for them anyway. With DIs always wearing SPI armor to Beta's fatigues and protective headgear, everyone became either very adept at stealth or very sore from Tactical Training Rounds.<p>

The company was presently involved in the final day of a three day survival exercise and that caution appeared to have been unnecessary. After having been dropped off in one of Onyx's rainforestsâ€”each equipped with three magazines for their MA5Ks, a flashbang, a canteen and ration bar, and a recovery beacon for pickup when taken outâ€”and told to last as long as they could, the teams had wandered about the jungle trying to 'kill' the competition, being graded on their performance all the while.

The four members of Fireteam Foxtrot were doing quite well, having eliminated three other teams over the first two days with no losses. Ghost they had neutralized a few hours in, throwing Min's flashbang into their too close together formation and then hitting each disoriented member with a burst of TTRs; they had taken the other group's supplies and moved on in less than thirty seconds. Lima they had hit as the opposing team set up camp on the first night; dropping their sentry with a TTR to the face, catching the other three away from their carbines, and making off with their kit as well.

Epsilon had almost gotten them on the second day; hiding up in the trees, they had an excellent ambush site. They would have had Foxtrot dead to rights if they had waited a second longer. As it happened, someone in Epsilon fired too earlyâ€”missing entirelyâ€”and sent Foxtrot into cover. All members having the better part of seven magazines, they had liberally applied ammunition to their opponents hiding spots as they found them, knocking them to ground level. They repeated the looting process and quickly moved onâ€”the exchange would have alerted every SPARTAN-in-training within a kilometer of where they were.

They had not encountered anyone since; taking a page from Epsilon and spending the night in a tree. Now, they were once again on the move through the dense jungle growth, Adam on point, Min bringing up the rear, with Tom and Lucy in the middle; all on high alert. The day so far had been uneventful.

"We're being followed." Min stated quietly. Of the four, he was the undisputed best at picking up on things that were out of place.

"How many and how far?" Tom whispered back. He had taken command of Foxtrot almost automatically, possessing as close to the ideal combination of deliberate caution and creativity out of the group, though Lucy felt he could stand to be a little looser when it came to the rules.

They all kept moving, making no indication that they knew anything was amiss.

"One; sounds like he's got a lot o' kit. Say thirty meters back and to the right."

That, Lucy knew, had to be B312. He was the only one in the company who would consider four to one odds to be in his favor and carry enough supplies to compromise his abilities at stealth. He was better alone than any other member of Beta, but he was such a narcissistic prick she just could not respect him for it (and she would maintain until the day she died that breaking his jaw in that sparring match was an accident—"no one could prove otherwise") (1).

Being between Adam and Tom, Lucy was unable to see her leader's nonverbal acknowledgement, but she heard his next whispered words.

"Flank him. We'll cover you."

She ducked away as her teammates turned, opened fire, and began to move into cover. Suppressive fire like they were doing, by its very nature, was meant to keep any enemy's head down—"any kills were merely a pleasant bonus. Additionally, the noise of their weapons' fire would serve to mask her approach.

Going at a sort of half-crouch run in an attempt to avoid disturbing the plants too much, Lucy made a wide arc towards the tree she saw her friends firing at—"a giant tree, the ridges of its roots taller than she was. She could see B312 looking away from her, waiting for a lull to return fire. She decided he was not going to have that long and shot him in the back.

He had half a dozen flashbangs, two MA5Ks, and most of the material that would necessarily come with that. The four stripped the Lone Wolf of his armament; Min helping Adam, who had been hit on his arm with a burst of 312's fire. He was still combat effective and so still in the exercise, but it broke their perfect streak. TTRs stung, Lucy knew this to be fact, but Adam's body language made it clear his pride hurt worse.

Foxtrot set off again, this time with Min in the lead and Lucy covering their rear, intent on completing the war game without any more losses. The match would continue until Mendez or Lieutenant Commander Ambrose said otherwise, the announcement being the only time their helmet radios were to be used. They could be operating for ten more minutes or ten more hours.

It officially ended four hours later—"four hours in which Foxtrot,

steady in pace but ultimately directionless, came across no one. Tom activated his recovery beacon and the four friends sat down to wait for one of Camp Currahee's transport Falcons (2). Lucy thought that they had done well.

When the VTOL arrived, the DI in the troop bay had to drop a cable and harness down, as the trees kept it from landing. Securing Adam in the harness (his TTR numbed limb making climbing impossible) Lucy and her two remaining squadmates had held on and been hoisted up to the craft. There were several other trainees present, though no one spoke on the short flight back to camp. As per usual, the landing field was full of SPARTAN recruits milling around—the post-game ranking being one of the few times they were able to relax.

Lucy noticed that their group had been the last brought in from the field, all the retrieval craft having been left in orderly rows and abandoned. She turned her attention to the scoreboard; from experience she knew that only the top ten teams would be shone, the other ninety-five receiving no recognition save perhaps advice.

The board flickered to life and the results scrolled across the screen. Team Romeo in tenth, followed by Oscar, Charlie, Sigma, Gamma, and Tau (3). In fourth was B312 with twenty 'kills.' He would have gotten higher if she had not tagged him—loss of situational awareness was costly. Thom-B293's Team Whiskey was in third with fifteen kills and three casualties. Tango, led by Kat-B320, took second also with fifteen kills but only two losses. In first . . .

. . . was Foxtrot. Thirteen kills, one walking wounded.

Lucy was ecstatic—though they had been on the board several times before, they had never come in first. She heard Adam and Min's victory yells and would have joined in, had she not suddenly felt Tom's arms around her and her helmet knock against his.

She was tense for a moment before relaxing and returning the embrace. She would have been perfectly happy to remain in that position, but several indiscreet coughs from the other half of Foxtrot jerked them both back to reality. Tom released her with a quiet 'Sorry.' And she was grateful for their visors being opaque—no one could see her blush.

* * *

><p>(1)—A general summation of the way I see every Male Six ever written. EVER. Six is in no way as awesome as Tom or Lucy.<p>

(2)—Because helicopters are no doubt less expensive than space shuttles to operate.

(3)—300 graduating SPARTANs means 75 four man teams or 60 five man teams. During Operation: TORPEDO, the only teams identified went by the NATO phonetic alphabet; unless each Fireteam is part of a twelve person squad or something similar, I had to use other alphabets.

A/N: Please review; constructive criticism is appreciated.

4. Chapter 3

Disclaimer: 343i/Microsoft owns the Halo franchise. It is thus their fault that this pairing is not canon.

****A/N #1:**** I wrote more than half of this chapter over the last few days, alternating between writing this and rereading Halo: Finishing the Fight by Red Mage 04â€”a fic I wholeheartedly recommend.

****A/N #2:**** This will be the last action-y chapter.

****A/N #3:**** Special thanks to Alturial and Spazzyninjafish, whose favs and follows reminded me that I should get back to this.

Word Count: 2,153

* * *

><p>Time: [Redacted] Location: ****[Redacted]****
Operation: GUILLLOTINE in progress.

There must have been a rule, Lucy thought, about not being able to tell the purpose of an operation from its codename. From the name, most might have assumed it was an assassination job; in truth, it was to evacuate a number of ONI personnel and their project from a previously peaceful colony after the Insurrection had suddenly set up shop there.

Foxtrot and eight other teams had been unexpectedly pulled from Operation: CARTWHEEL, transferred to the prowler Man in Black, and briefed on their new assignment before being thrown into cryopods for the month-long trip to wherever they were going. They had arrived at the edge of the system two days ago and the stealth ship's captain had ordered an indirect course to avoid detection. They had succeeded in that and when the Man in Black had made a quick pass by the colony, launching a STARS satellite and the thirty-six SPARTANS deployed via HEV. The rushed drop ended up spreading them out over approximately three square kilometers outside the settlement limitsâ€”a minor inconvenience to be certain, but preferable by far to landing in the middle of a firefightâ€”by chance, it also put Teams Epsilon and Juliet in ideal locations to converge on and eliminate an Insurrectionist artillery position.

The SPARTANS had split up by teams so as to be less of a target for hostile surveillance and quickly covered the distance to the colonies sole population center. Progress had naturally slowed to a crawl in the urban area, the wide, straight streets leaving little cover despite all the detritus littering them.

Their pattern was the same they always used: Adam in front, this time holding an M247 GPMG (1) in his hands; Lucy behind him with an XM510 grenade launcher (2). Next was Tom clutching a scoped MA5K and an SRS99 on his back. Min was last, covering Foxtrot's rear with an M90 CAWS, an M392 DMR magnetically sealed to his back. All had M6Ds on their hips.

The STARS above them provided the SPARTANS with a fairly detailed, real-time map of the cityâ€”it allowed them to skirt around heavy fighting altogether or hit the Innies where they were weakest. It was not, however, infallible, and they knew it could miss a single

rooftop sniper as easily as it could identify a Marine fireteam setting up an ambush; hence their slow progress.

They were cutting through a narrow alley when Adam suddenly halted his advance; the rest of the team following suit immediately. With his free hand he made a series of gestures that Lucy mentally translated without effort: Movement. Across the street, right side. Third floor.

The young SPARTANs pressed themselves against the alleyway in an effort to minimize their profiles; Ada withdrew a small fiber-optic camera from a satchel on his free hip. A small box appearing in the lower left corner of her HUD was the only indication that the device had been activated. The others would have the same setup, but the transmission range would not extend much further than Min's safety feature, given how easily ELINT (3) suites could be acquired.

The feed was far from perfect, but it was clear enough to see sunlight reflecting off the distinctive muzzle of an older model SRS99. The sight itself was a violation of some of the most basic rules of infantry doctrine in general—let alone of sniper's—that it erased any possibility of the rifle's operator being, or having ever been, UNSC. The only option left was Insurrectionist cannon fodder: a poorly trained goon set there to bog down the marines until they cleared the building with a mortar strike or similar.

The observation had taken only seconds, and as Lucy glanced away from the video, she saw Tom and Min leave the shelter of the wall, rifles up. From experience, she knew that the 7.62x51mm rounds both weapons fired had enough power to go through the building's wall, any unarmored (and, depending on the model, some armored) parts of the gunman they connected with, through the next wall, and quite possibly the one after that depending on several factors—not least of which was civilian construction, which tended not to meet military standards for resilience. She also knew that they would have activated the thermal imaging setting for their visors to insure they hit their target (or targets, since it was entirely possible that the would-be sniper had a security detail).

When it was only Tom who fired a short, controlled burst into where the hostile's head and chest most likely were (admirably timed to a newer string of gunfire from somewhere else in the city), she knew the target had been alone. Tom gestured for them to move up. No one hesitated, or looked back.

This was hardly Beta Company's first combat operation, but it was the only one as yet undertaken against human rebels. It left a sour taste in Lucy's mouth; that humanity was fighting amongst itself as another power sought its extermination. She had never killed another human; she wondered if she could when the scenario was inevitably forced upon her. It was different from fighting the Covenant, whom were all agents of the organization that had taken her family from her and ultimately placed her in the life she now had.

The four continued deeper into the arcology, avoid combat when necessary and assisting the beleaguered Marine and Army units where they could—silencing a mortar team and turning the weapon upon its former owners; raiding a supply depot and using the ordinance acquired to wreak havoc on the Innies' mechanized forces. Similar scenes occurred throughout the self-sufficient city as the

SPARTAN-III commandos systematically eradicated all that stood against them, the superior training of the UNSC forces winning out over the insurgents' zeal and numbers. The city would be securely back in UNSC hands, and the SPARTANS would have their own objective, soon enough.

Fireteam Foxtrot was within 500 meters of the ONI facility when they were ambushed. A single Falcon VTOL, its IFF pinging UNSC but the burning fist of the Insurrection emblazoned on its sides, swooped in with its two .50 caliber machine guns firing away.

As the four dove into concealment, Lucy was able to take stock of the situation. Firstly, the aircraft had had the customary 20mm machine gun and replaced with what appeared to be a sensor suite—it had probably been helping coordinate the Insurrectionists' movements for some time. She also noted that neither of the door gunners possessed anything that would provide them with a HUD—which would, if nothing else, make it harder for them to find Foxtrot. Lastly she saw a transport variant Warthog come to a screeching halt behind the UH-144. Then they were all out of sight and she was trying to find a better position.

Lucy still had her XM510—it was the only weapon that had a chance of quickly bringing down the VTOL—so while she tried to flank it, the others would dispatch the gunners and suppress the other hostiles. She could hear both groups trading fire already.

It did not take long to find a hole in the wall she had gone behind. The Falcon was in the process of turning around, the port gunner trying to draw a bead on one of the elusive supersoldiers. The starboard gunner was dead, by way of Min's shotgun given the wounds. There was the distinct _Crack!_ of a DMR firing and the formerly living gunner slumped over, now missing half his head. She was too far back to see the hostile infantry.

It took only a moment to work the best trajectory for bringing the craft down. Lucy swiftly aimed her grenade launcher and pulled the trigger. The explosive struck the roof of the VTOL's troop bay and detonated on impact. The blast tore through the top mounted thrusters, the floor port rotor—heavily damaging it. The pilot's attempts to bring it back under control succeeded only in making the rotor assembly shear off. Gravity immediately reasserted its dominion and the transport dropped like so much rock.

Lucy's motion tracker showed six red and three yellow dots moving about. She placed the XM510 on her back, drew her M6D, and moved to assist her teammates. Adam and Min had each been pinned down by a trooper armed the .30 caliber 'Confetti Makers' the Insurrection was so fond of; Tom was tied up in a melee with three more Innies, and the sixth had disappeared altogether.

Tom, she knew, would be fine; while he was not the best hand-to-hand combatant in Beta Company, he was far from the worst. Three unaugmented humans would not give him any trouble. She opted to eliminate the nearest LMG toting Insurrectionist, who was suppressing Adam.

Using her armor's photoreactive plates and the debris littering the street, Lucy swiftly made her way behind the rebel. She placed the pistol back on her hip and drew the combat knife from its sheath

behind her left shoulder (4) and silently approached. The Innie was a woman—blond, fit, and possibly not much older than the Alpha Company washouts who had helped train the Betas. Maybe her motion tracker was a better model than standard, maybe she was just lucky, but the woman started to turn as the SPARTAN neared.

It would do her no good.

With the unnatural fluidity that all SPARTANs possessed, Lucy slapped the Confetti Maker out of her hands and head-butted her in her unprotected face. As the woman staggered back, Lucy's left hand lashed out with the speed of a striking serpent and seized her by the throat; the woman's eyes widened in terror as she was pulled close.

Lucy stabbed upwards, the 20cm blade plunging up to the hilt in the woman's skull; it was twisted and torn back out, just like she had been trained. The woman twitched once and was still. That was the first time she had seen the human she was killing. She filed the thoughts away for after the mission was done.

With the trooper dead, Adam was able to leave cover and put a five round burst into the rebel suppressing Min. Lucy looked over to Tom as his final opponent received a broken neck for his efforts.

The sixth Insurrectionist reappeared on her motion tracker as she heard Adam and Min's simultaneous yell of "Grenade!" before she saw it arcing past her to where Tom stood. He still had his hands full of dead terrorist and she knew he would not be able to get clear in time. At such close range the SPI armor was unlikely to protect him.

She broke into a dash; if she did it right, her momentum would carry them both over the hood of the car behind him; hopefully putting enough matter between them and the explosion to keep them safe. Time slowed down as she covered the twenty meter distance between Tom and herself. At fifteen meters, she saw the grenade hit the ground. At ten, Tom had thrown the corpse he had been holding onto it. At five meters he was turning towards the car. Then, less than two and a half seconds after she had started moving, he was beside her.

She wrapped her arms around him as they collided and knocked him off his feet. Lucy felt the air be driven from her lungs as they smashed into the car. The two SPARTANs were able to channel their remaining forward motion into a roll that dropped them off on the other side of the vehicle. They landed, and Lucy felt Tom pull her closer.

It might have been an instinctive attempt to protect her or it could have been subconscious fear; whatever his reasons for tightening the embrace, Lucy found it . . . soothing. If they were not in combat, she would have enjoyed staying like that. Tom had been with her since the beginning, one unwavering constant in a life that offered too few.

The grenade went off in a wash of fire and shrapnel. Lucy's helmet automatically compensated for the increases in light and sound, opaquing her visor and dialing down the audio input levels. When it was over, she noticed that Tom was reluctant to let her go—it took him a fraction of a second longer to stop holding her than he needed.

The rebel was dead, torn apart by fire from both their teammates. Tom had them hold position while he and Lucy scavenged the Confetti Makers, their own weapons having been damaged in the blast.

"What you did was risky." He said over a private channel, once they had started moving again, "Thanks."

Lucy could think of no way to properly respond and merely gave a slight nod, imperceptible to anyone who was not looking for it.

* * *

><p>(1)—"The Halo 2 machine gun.

(2)—"The one used by Warthog passengers in _Halo Wars_, not the piece of crap from _Reach._

(3)—"Electronic Intelligence.

(4)—"Appears in concept art of the SPI suit.

[cultist] Reviews for the Review God! Concrit for the Concrit Throne!
[/cultist]

5. Chapter 4

Disclaimer: If I owned _Halo_, I would have gotten someone else to write the Kilo-5 Trilogy.

I mean, what purpose did having Lucy start speaking again serve?

What happened to Jerrod and the Sentinels? Did they go on strike? A coffee break? Did they breach the Fourth wall, see that they were going to be in a Karen Traviss novel, and flee in screaming terror?

**A/N: **I thought this one would have more impact if it was shorter.

Response to reviews:

Cubed ice—"Thank you. As to your question, I take it that you are unfamiliar with the music of Johnny Cash; the combining of his song "Man in Black" and the Office of Naval Intelligence results in a large quantity of irony.

Word count: 687

* * *

><p>How do you know we're alive?

2241 HOURS, JULY 3, 2545 (MILITARY CALENDER)\ BLACK CAT SUB PROWLER, SLIPSPACE

She had finally fallen asleep.

He could tell when it happened by the subtle change in her breathing. Whether it would offer any respite from the knowledge of what had occurred, he did not know.

Tom continued to stare at the diagnostic panels and control consoles that surrounded the Black Cat's pilot station. The small ship was automated to the point that his oversight was unnecessary, but if he looked away all there was to see would be Lucy's tear-streaked face and the empty seats that should have been filled with comrades winding down and celebrating the mission's completion. He knew it was weak of himâ€”disrespectful to them evenâ€”but he could not bring himself to look, to acknowledge that they were the only ones left.

From the time they had clawed their way out of Pegasi Delta's toxic sea until they had reached the exfiltration craft, they had operated on autopilotâ€”there survival had still been at stake and thinking about what had transpired would have done nothing more than jeopardize their lives. He had not allowed himself to think about it until they had entered Slipstream spaceâ€”but he could not put it off any longer.

The rest of Beta Company was dead and it was all theirâ€”hisâ€”fault. It had been his decision to go to the refinery's reactor, to cause it to overload. It was bad enough that Adam and Min had died in the process, but that no one else had escaped? They had killed their comrades as surely as the Covenant would have.

Intellectually, Tom knew it was Survivor's Guilt making him think that wayâ€”it did not help. He kept going back to those few minutes, trying to find a way that might not have gone so horribly right. Could they have waited to sabotage the reactor, given the other SPARTANs more time to disengage? Could they have missed a survivor, leaving a friend to die on that hellhole? Should they have died there as well?

No. He crushed that notionâ€”it was dangerous. _Thoughts like that won't bring them back. Wallowing in self-pity won't get us through this. We need to be strong._

Tom heard a choked cry and turned to look at Lucy. He recognized the signsâ€”the twitching, the shallow breaths, how she had broken out in a cold sweat. She was having a nightmare. It seemed that not even unconsciousness could bring her any peace.

He could not bear to do nothing; to watch as she writhed about, torturing herself over what had happened. Tom extricated himself from the crash webbing of the pilot's seat and moved to sit in front of her. He took her hands in his.

Bereft of her armor and the camaraderie of Beta Company, Lucy seemed so small and . . . _fragile_ . . . now. To be sure, he felt far more vulnerable now than he had twelve hours agoâ€”but her change, from the fierce and energetic fighter he could always trust to have his back no matter the situation to the quivering, sobbing wreck in front of him, seemed so much more terrible. He gently squeezed her hands, wanting to comfort her but unwilling to wake her.

Whether the nightmare had passed or his gestures had worked, she

visiblyâ€”slightlyâ€”relaxed. It gave him hope, however little, that they could get through this. He rose, and carefully picked her up.

He sat back down in the next seat over, her head resting on his right shoulder. Lucy huddled closer and he saw a smile briefly flit across her lips. She opened her eyes briefly and he saw in themâ€”what? Relief? Affection? Or was it something else, something greater? She closed her eyes and the moment was gone, but he held her as firmly as ever.

Their entire world had changed, but he knew this much: they had to survive and carry on. They would need each other for that.

He would be strong. For her.

* * *

><p>Feedback is appreciated. I mean it.

6. Chapter 5

Disclaimer: If I had any say in _Halo_'s story, post-war novels would have done much differently. Probably better. The Kilo-5 Trilogy exists though, so it's safe to say that I don't.

****A/N:**** Also quite short. I just couldn't think of any way to make it longer. Padding skills, why have you forsaken me so?

****A/N#2:**** Chapters 1-4 can be considered canon compliant with the official universe (OPERATION: Guillotine's timing being the explanation for why Kat was transferred out of Beta Company but Lucy, who was also supposed to be, was not). Perhaps this chapter can as well, though I honestly can't remember that much of _Glasslands_ unless it involved my own rage. These five chapters can also be considered part of my _Halo_/_Star Wars_ crossover _Non Sequitur_ and any sequels I make to it.

Cubed iceâ€”Thanks.

Word count: 658

* * *

><p>You two didn't survive Pegasi Delta to die here . .
.

0156 HOURS, NOVEMBER 5, 2552 (MILITARY CLENDAR)\ FORERUNNER MICRO
DYSON SPHERE, ONYX

For their first nightâ€”though not even Dr. Halsey was entirely sure how the Forerunners had managed that cycleâ€”the survivors had camped out within a copse of what looked to be deciduous trees. The camp itself was decidedly minimalist; the eight Slipspace pods were spread out to provide the most cover, the group was scattered evenly throughout to better defend the position. The guard pattern was simple: two SPARTANs stood watch on rotating shifts. Being that there were eight of the supersoldiers, they deemed to let Halsey and Mendez sleep; not only would the two need the rest for the next day, but

without the alternate vision modes provided by their helmets or the commandos' natural night vision they would be more of a hindrance than a help.

Tom and Lucy had just ended their watch, having been relieved by Linda and Ash, and had set up against one of the larger trees. He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close. This was the first chance they had gotten to think about what had happened on Onyx.

Almost everything was gone. Camp Currahee, the closest thing they had to a home for the last dozen years. What few material possessions that they ownedâ€”remnants of their old lives, gifts to each other, a few random knickknacks. The camp's staffâ€”friendsâ€”people who had been there for them after Pegasi were all dead.

Kurt. The SPARTAN-II had been many things to them; a commanding officer, a stern task master, a mentor. The closest they had to a father figure. He had been one of the few constants in their lives and now he was dead too, just like everyone else.

Mendez was still alive at least; the old CPO seemed to be incapable of dying. He was the only person still living that they could actually say they knew. They had helped train the Gammas, true, but they did not know that much about them as individuals; Doctor Halsey and Blue Team they had just met. They had only heard tales of the latter's achievements. That was all that was left of their worldâ€”a little bit of familiarity and a few strangers they knew only by word of mouth. Well, and each other.

It barely gave Tom pause when he realized that he no longer thought in terms of '_he_' but in terms of '_they_'â€”of Lucy and himself. He could hardly remember a time where she had not been by his side and could not imagine one where she would not. They were rarely out of each other's sight and when they were, it had never been for long.

Tom had known for a while that their relationship went beyond that of just friends or teammates. Neither of them knew just what it was though. Were they lovers? They had no experience with romantic love nor any idea who or how they could askâ€”Mendez and the Lieutenant Commander had always been devoted to their jobs, the older drill instructors they worked alongside not quite as much so. No one they knew at Camp Currahee had ever had anything beyond a professional relationship.

Certainly it was more than just trivial _lust_. They were physically attracted to each other, but that was an incredibly minor component to their feelings. The plain truth of the matter was that they were never at ease when they were separated; each valued their partner's life more than their own. The thought of losing one another terrified them more than the thought of death itself did.

They drew closer in their shared embrace; though they could not feel each other through the battered armor they wore, they could take comfort in that little bit of contact. They would be fine, so long as they were together.

* * *

><p>Review, would you kindly?<p>

7. Chapter 6

Disclaimer: I'm running (read: have already run) out of creative ways to say that this pairing would have already been canon if I had any say in _Halo_. The people of 343i are the arbiters of what is and what is not in this franchise.

****A/N:**** It occurs to me after writing this chapter, that it could be considered to take place in _Non Sequitur_ as well. Most of the expansions haven't held entirely true to the snippets, but this one was the farthest removed: I had originally intended to make it specific to a continuity constraining degree, but that just didn't pan out.

Response(s) to Review(s):

Mr. Slickbackâ€_Exactly._ Also, thanks.

Word Count: 1,035

* * *

><p>. . . There's too much left for you to do.

1845 HOURS, DECEMBER 17, 2552 (MILITARY CALENDER)\ONYX SHIELD
WORLD

The group had spent several weeks trekking through the temperate regionâ€though the entire sphere could have been like that, they did not know and likely never wouldâ€they had been dropped in. They foraged and hunted what they could discern to be edible to supplement their meager rations as they meandered about the land. No one had any idea what they were looking for.

They had actually been able to camp beneath the trees near a creek. While it could not be called a morale boosterâ€the SPARTANS in particular were more bored or vexed than they were disheartened by their situationâ€everyone was happy to be able to clean themselves off after days of travel in the same outfit. They had bathed in small groups while the others stood guard as was general procedure, though the Lieutenant had surprised everyone and ordered the IIIs to remain out of armor and relaxâ€at least as much as SPARTANS could relax outside of a fully secured area. By and large, that meant he thought it was safe enough to conduct more in-depth maintenance on their SPI suits and weapons. If they finished those tasks before their turn on watch, they were free to do as they pleased. Naturally they had all been swift and meticulous and soon all five of the younger soldiers were trying to figure out how to use their sudden downtime.

Team Saber had gone back to the creek for a swimâ€one of the few times they would ever come close to acting like normal kids rather than Special Forces commandoes, Lucy could not help but think with a hint of bitterness. Not that she and Tom were all that different. Rather than join the Gammas though, the two had wandered further into the forest; not so far as to lose sight of the camp, but enough that they would not be disturbed. There they had sat down, side by side, against the trunk of a particularly large tree. There was much for

them to think about.

Lucy knew she felt more for Tom than just that of a friend, even one forged in war; she would not know what to do without him. She knew he reciprocated. What sheâ€"what _they_â€"did not know was what to do. They held the same rank, so no official regulations forbade them from pursuing a romantic, or even just physical, relationship if they chose to do so. Each would charge an armored battalion to get the other back if they had to; they knew this as surely as they knew how to breathe. By the same token though, that kind of attachment could jeopardize a missionâ€"she might have been perfectly willing for Tom to leave her to die if it meant he would live, but she would never do so if the positions were reversed; he held the exact same sentiments and neither of them would change that stance.

Of course, if they actually made it out of the Shield World, they would probably be separated. Lucy would never be a frontline operatorâ€"her trauma induced silence was too much of a liability for any commander to allow that. If they got back to the UNSCâ€"if the Covenant had not exterminated humanityâ€"they would certainly be split up. Tom would be sent to some SPECWAR team, her to wherever ONI put combat assets they could not use. They would probably never see each other again before they died in the fighting of some last stand. There would be _nothing_ they could do about it, save bear the circumstances and carry on. The real questions lay in what they would do if they never escaped the Shield World or did and by some miracle survived the War.

In the latter case, they would certainly leave the military; it was hard enough for them to accept making the Gammas into suicide commandos, even with the Covenant. ONI would probably send them off to conduct something similar if they stayed on. If they left, they presently had few non-military skills, no connections in the civilian world, and little idea of what being a civilian actually entailed. As far as they knew, there was no compensation for anyone who wanted to leave the SPARTAN-III Programâ€"no one had been expected to live that long.

If they remained stuck in Onyx for the rest of their lives, perhaps the last surviving traces of humanity . . . what? Did they continue as they had or progress their relationship? Physical intimacy was really the only aspect that was not present in their lives and not something they had ever thought much about; not entirely absent, but a very low priority far behind their duties as soldiers. That they might have to be parents just to eke out a few more generations of their species could never have crossed their minds. The thought of being a parent at all _scared_ her. The concept was just too foreign.

Or would Halsey crack the Slip-space pods and they would all spend an eternity in stasis? Was their fate to be an endless false sleep until the pods ran out of power or the star at the center of the construct died? That everyone who perished to get them hereâ€"and to try and turn the tide of the warâ€"might have died in vain seemed so much worse than anything else. Sheâ€"_theyâ€"_would never be able to allow, to accept, that.

She leaned against Tom, resting her head on his shoulder and turning slightly to put her arms around him. The body gloves they both wore were, if nothing else, much more comfortable to lean against than the

armor that normally covered them. One of his hands clasped hers and she felt the warmth of his head against hers. Being like this had always had a calming effect on her, ever since the first time when they had huddled together beneath descent pack to keep warm. Come what may, they would persevere. So long as they had each other.

* * *

><p>Critiques are, as always, welcome.<p>

8. Chapter 7

Disclaimer: _Halo_ belongs to 343i; I own nothing.

****A/N:**** And so we have arrived at the final chapter of _Embrace_. It's been great fun to write and maybe I'll do some more dedicated Tom/Lucy fics in the future, but I have no such plans now. Thanks to everyone who has reviewed, faved, and/or followed.

Response(s) to review(s):

Just a Crazy-Manâ€œThanks.

Word count: 1,822

* * *

><p>It had been a long time. The survivors had eventually escaped the Shield World in some kind of Forerunner warship. When they had made it to Earth they had been understandably surprised to find that the war was effectively over and humanity had if not won, then at least survived. Then they had been split up.<p>

Halsey and Mendez had been the first to departâ€œthe former to fully unlock the secrets of the Forerunner craft; the latter had dropped off the grid entirely, presumably shanghaied into another ONI black ops project. The Gammas had been taken back into the fold of their company, the operations they partook in highly classified.

Then Lucy had been taken from him, discharged and sent to a psychiatric hospital for evaluation while he was assigned to Blue Team. Tom had fought alongside them until SPARTAN-117â€œthe Master Chiefâ€œhad been recovered, whereupon he had been transferred to a team called Noble as a temporary replacement.

He had served in other units as well, leaving when their wounded members came back or the team was decimated in battle. He had not seen anyone from the time in Onyxâ€œhad not seen _Lucy_â€œin years. He had just seen many good people die. Ultimately, he was tiredâ€œof the death, of the killing, of the war. He, like all SPARTANs, dreamed of the day he was unneeded; that there would be a time without the threat of extinction or violent rebellion. It was a pipe dream of course; he had realized that long ago. Whether it was some sense of duty, or obligation, or just that it was the only life he knew, he had continued to serve anyway.

Tom had finally had enough; he had forwarded the appropriate forms to Section III and they had honorably discharged himâ€œcomplete with proper documentation, nearly two decades of back pay, and a sizable

bonus he knew was actually 'hush money,' a reminder to keep silent about the SPARTAN-III Program. It had taken some cajoling and wrangling bureaucratic red tape, but he had also gotten them to tell him where Lucy wasâ€”she had been sent to one of the psychiatric hospitals on Sigma Octanus IV. She had been releasedâ€”still muteâ€”several years previous and had not left the planet. He was certain the spooks knew exactly where she was and were not telling him, but the lead was enough. He had purchased a chatter, several changes of clothing, some basic supplies, a pair of duffel bags to store them in, and passage on the next vessel to that colony.

Once on the ground, it was a simple matter to rent a vehicleâ€”a navy blue 2551 model Warthogâ€”and drive to where Lucy had been sent for therapy. During his brief stop there, the place was a hive of activityâ€”not at all surprising given that there was no shortage of people with PTSD or other problems. Her release, he was told, had to do with a lack of living space and professionals, an overabundance of patients, and how she could function well enough in day to day life that they had a hard time keeping her there when so many others were so much worse off.

He had beenâ€”foolishlyâ€”worried that Lucy would not have left a forwarding address or that some regulation would keep him from finding out. She had and there was not, though he had needed to answer several questions that only the two of them (and maybe Mendez) would know the correct responses to, then he was on his way. He had sent her a short text as well: It's been too long; it'll be nice to catch up on things.â€”Tom. He did it partly out of nervous excitement and partly because he doubted she had started liking surprises since they had last seen each other.

Lucy had moved to one of the colony's more rural areas. Tom understood her reasoningâ€”less development and fewer people meant it was quiet, which was a quality they both valued; the terrain, gently rolling hills and farms tended by JOTUNS, combined with the first two points made the area of negligible value as a target to Insurrectionists or Covenant. It was a decent mix of peaceful and safe; Tom could appreciate the simple beauty of that. Costs of living were also lower in these kinds of areas and her smaller severance payâ€”she had served for a shorter time and left at a lower rank than he hadâ€”might not have left an adequate financial safety net in one of the cities.

It was mid-afternoon by the time he arrived at her homeâ€”a discreet prefab model that had probably been used by survivors displaced in the wake of the Covenant's assault on the planet in 2552. Calling it pretty would have been a bald faced lie, but then it was never meant to be visually appealing; put together even half competently, it could easily go several decades with effectively no maintenance. It was easy enough to understand why she had chosen it. He parked to Warthog by the car already thereâ€”he did not recognize the model, though he figured it was from a local manufacturerâ€”walked up to the door, and knocked. He hoped his information was right.

There were several secondsâ€”though it felt like an eternityâ€”of silence before the door opened. Only slightly at first; he could see herâ€”and it was Lucyâ€”looking him over. Then the door was open fully and she had stepped out to meet him. Physically, she had changed: her dark hair went down to her shoulders rather than the regulation cut she had sported on Onyx; she also looked to have lost

some muscle mass in the intervening timeâ€”not out of shape by any means, but no longer up to SPARTAN standards after years of treatment and psychological evaluation. She still moved with the same fluid grace though, andâ€”most importantlyâ€”the intelligence in her eyes, though guarded, had not diminished. She was still the Lucy he had known.

She placed a hand on his cheek, as though to reassure herself that he was real and not just a dream or a figment of her imagination. Her touch was warm and gentle and he watched the wariness fade from her face and be replaced with a smile. In one smooth motion, their bodies were pressed together, her arms wrapped around him and her face nestled into his chest. A shudder wracked her body and he looked down to see tears glistening in the corners of her eyes. There might have been a time when he would have given her some good natured teasing for such an emotional outburstâ€”SPARTANS were supposed to be stoic and reserved, after allâ€”but not now. Instead, he held her close and cried with her.

* * *

><p>The rest of the day and into the evening was spent on a hillside catching up on each other's lives. Tom did not speak, rather they both communicated by handâ€”in a mix of standard sign language, hand signals that had been unique to Beta Company, and symbols that they had devised themselves over their time together. Anything else had come to feel unnatural.<p>

Tom felt that Lucy had suffered more than he had since they had parted. He had left the military emotionally exhausted and with only superficial injuries; she had been subjected to dozens of different treatments which were at best ultimately useless and at worst had been outright harmful. She had grappled with chemically induced stupors and bouts of suicidal depression brought on by presumably well-meaning physicians trying to treat her for something most of them had never seen while her altered metabolism undercut those efforts. He was simultaneously guilt-ridden over not being there for her when she needed him most and awed by the inner strength it must have taken to not only survive, but overcome, it all. She had always had that force of willâ€”and he loved her more for itâ€”but it would never stop amazing him. Since she had moved to where she now lived, she described her life as uneventfulâ€”she got along with her neighbors and coworkers, even if there was trouble communicating with them, while her financial situation was more or less secure.

It was dark when they finally ran out of things to discuss. At any other time, in any other place, they might have gone inside, but the night was warm and the sky clearâ€”an ideal time for stargazing. They had taken it up after TORPEDO; finding the light of Pegasi-B's star was as close to a proper vigil for their fallen comrades as they had ever managed to do. It had continued as a means of being by themselvesâ€”occasionally someone else from the camp would join them, but more often than not they were alone. Those times together, sad though they could be, were some of their best memories.

Now she pointed out to him the lights from Sol, Zeta Doradus, and Epsilon Eridani; Pegasi simply was not visible at this point in the planet's orbit. It was cathartic and, after opening old wounds as they bared their souls to each other, allowed them to feel at peace for the first time in far too long.

Tom adjusted his position so that he was lying on his side; Lucy mirrored his movements so that they were facing each other. He gently put his arms around her waist and drew her close. She was his, he was hers, and they would never let that change. When he looked at her he saw not only the person he wanted to spend the rest of his lifeâ€”his futureâ€”with, but half of who he was. They had been through enough over their lives to know that the future was anything but certain; so long as they had each other though, they would carry on.

Lucy looped her arms around his neck and rolled so that he was once again on his back, only now she lay on top of him. He had a moment to look at her curiously before she gently pressed her lips to his. The kiss was slow, deliberate, and chaste; a simple action that nonetheless said so much. Tom hesitated for a fraction of a heartbeat before reciprocating. They were reluctant to end it, but eventually she pulled away, moving her arms to drape over his chest as she did so. She laid her head there as well and looked at him through half-lidded eyes, the smile on her lips so subtle that only he would have ever been able to see it. He closed his eyes, listening to her subdued breathing, savoring the warmth of her body against his.

It had been a long time coming, but they were finallyâ€”trulyâ€”happy.

* * *

><p>Those who wish to read more fics starring prominently featuring Tom and Lucy should peruse the following:

AgentQV's _Silent No-More_

Several chapters of firerwolf's _Spartan Love_ and one of _Roses_

Trivun's _Memories_

Don Piano's _Spartan's Never Die_

Drake S. Hellion's _In Infinitum_

* * *

><p>As always, please review.<p>

End
file.